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Ms. Anita Vandenbeld

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1300)

[*English*]

The Chair (Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.)): I'd like to call this meeting to order.

Before I begin, I would just like to remind everyone that during the course of this meeting we do not allow videorecording or photographs to be taken. I'd ask that everybody please be conscious of that.

[*Translation*]

Welcome, everyone.

Please have a seat, colleagues.

On today's agenda is a briefing on the human rights situation involving the Uyghurs.

[*English*]

We have as a witness Mehmet Tohti, who is a representative of the Uyghur Canadian Society.

[*Translation*]

Mehmet Tohti was born in Xinjiang province in China and now lives in Toronto. He is the founder of the Uyghur Canadian Society and was vice-president of the World Uyghur Congress. Mr. Tohti also appeared before our subcommittee in March 2014.

[*English*]

I welcome you back to the committee, Mr. Tohti. I know that you've testified here once before.

The structure of the meeting today will be a 10-minute opening statement, and I would ask that you keep to that time frame. That will be followed by rounds of questions from the members of Parliament present.

With that, Mr. Tohti, I would invite you to begin your opening statement.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti (Representative, Uyghur Canadian Society): Thank you so much.

This is my third testimony in the House, especially in this committee. In 2006 and 2014, I came to the House with our leader.

First of all, on behalf of the Uighur Canadian community from coast to coast, I would like to thank each member for giving us this opportunity to shed light on the dire situation of Uighurs that continues with the intensification by the Chinese government.

Uighurs are Turkic-speaking people living in their ancestral homeland in East Turkestan, which was changed to the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in October 1955, right after the annexation in 1949 with Tibet and Mongolia.

The human rights emergency of the Uighurs requires an urgent and resolute response from Canada and other western democracies because of the atrocities and the millions of Uighurs and other native ethnic groups who are affected. As we speak, according to some independent research organizations, such as the Chinese Human Rights Defenders, and other media reports, millions of Uighurs are being held in concentration camps extrajudicially by the Chinese government. Uighurs are approximately 1.5% of the total population in China, yet 25% of all prisoners in China are Uighurs. This number excludes those millions held in concentration camps.

The Uighur identity, including language, culture, history, unique architecture and religious beliefs, including Islamic dietary practices, praying and keeping religious books at home, as well as religious sanctuaries like mosques, churches and other elements, are being criminalized harshly by the Chinese government and punished indiscriminately.

Since the arrival of Chen Quanguo in late 2016, the textbook example of ethnic cleansing, collective punishment and the dehumanization of the Uighur people became routine and raised fear and alarm about what was going to be next. China's extended hand in the Rohingya genocide is well known. Now Uighurs as a nation are paying an extremely high price for a Chinese ambitious plan that was spearheaded by President Xi Jinping. China's belt and road initiative was presented as a 21st-century Marshall Plan. It was intended to colonize weaker and poorer nations by debt traps and eventually replace China as a global boss. East Turkistan is where four land corridors for belt and road initiative projects branch out to central Asia, part of Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

China is now sealing off the entire region, cutting off communication in and out, and building hundreds of concentration camps that hold millions of Uighurs without any charges or any terms of release. Continuous expansion of concentration camps in an open bid and the building of crematoria in every county in the region remind us of the past sad history of the 1940s. If anyone doubts that this is a kind of exaggeration, I recommend that they flip through the history books that recorded more than 80 million civilian deaths in the 1950s by the Communist Party. Especially, as reported by the Associated Press, the Chinese government is now separating Uighur children from their legal parents and locking them up in children's camps with barbed wire and heavy security under the name of kindergartens. Recent reports confirmed that a large number of Uighur inmates are being transferred to mainland China by stopping regular railroad service for civilians. That was reported by Radio Free Asia's Mandarin service yesterday.

Canadian citizens of Uighur origin have been victimized through harassment, threats and intimidation by the Chinese government and through hostage taking of their family members for a long time. A Canadian citizen of Uighur origin, Mr. Huseyin Jelil, has been serving a life sentence in China since 2006. Despite numerous updates, briefings to our government officials and high-level public statements by the U.S. government, including by Vice-President Pence, Secretary of State Pompeo, the U.S. Senate and Congress, and despite a number of urgent calls by the United Nations and the European Union member states to China to close the camps and release the Uighur victims, Canada has yet to issue a public statement to acknowledge the crisis and condemn the 21st-century concentration camps that are holding millions of Uighurs.

● (1305)

This double standard that Canada is uniquely holding compared to other western democracies not only undermines our credibility as a champion of promoting human rights globally, but it has already given the impression that we issue statements on the basis of country select. This double standard approach will keep our head down when history records the cries of Uighurs in the future.

Following are my recommendations to the attention of this committee.

I ask the Canadian Parliament to adapt a binding resolution for urging the Canadian government to follow the United Nations, European Union member states and U.S. response to the Uighur crises and to issue a strong public statement as soon as possible.

I urge the subcommittee to hold a second urgent hearing, or more, in the shortest possible time and listen to more first-hand witnesses to understand what is really going on in those concentration camps. I will assist in all my capacities to make such organization possible.

I urge the Canadian government to send a parliamentary fact-finding mission to East Turkestan to observe the 21st-century Orwellian state, and if possible talk with the Uighur victims.

I urge the Canadian government to follow in the footsteps of Germany and Sweden and issue a moratorium to immediately halt the deportation of Uighur refugees back to China. There is an 18-year-old Uighur girl who's already received a deportation order even though she doesn't have family back in China.

I urge the Canadian government to accept 3,000 to 4,000 Uighur refugees who are currently trapped in Turkey in fear of deportation back to China at any time. They are living without any access to humanitarian relief. UNHCR processes take more than four years.

Uighur families with newborn children abroad especially are experiencing hardship as they cannot get any citizenship for their kids from the Chinese mission. China is pushing them to go back to China by refusing to issue ID documents. Newborn Uighur kids are therefore stateless in many countries. Their birthright citizenship is not granted.

I urge Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to review its policy for Uighur refugees and to speed up processing their refugee claims.

Finally, I ask the Government of Canada to use the Canadian Magnitsky act to punish those Chinese officials who are responsible for this crime against humanity occurring to Uighurs right now.

I thank you for your attention and I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for those remarks.

We'll open the questioning, for seven minutes, with Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome to the committee. It's good to have you here.

I don't have a lot of time here today, unfortunately. Hopefully we'll have a couple more hearings on this. I'd like you to talk a little bit about the security apparatus that's in place in this area. I know the camps exist. There are also massive checkpoints. I know there's DNA sampling.

Can you just talk a little bit about the security situation that these people are forced to live under presently?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: As the United Nations concluded, the homeland of the Uighurs became a no-rights zone for Uighurs. Every 50 metres there are checkpoints—at the entrance to every mall, every bus stop. To get to the bus stop you have to go through an X-ray.

Even within your home, inside or outside, you have to accept installation of security cameras or some kind of recording devices.

For the past two years, the Chinese government has forcefully taken blood samples of Uighurs for DNA sequencing, iris scanning, blood samples, fingerprints, voice recognition and voice data collection.

All Uighurs are basically criminalized. There is no movement from one neighbourhood to another. Currently in some areas in the southern part of East Turkestan, where the majority of Uighurs live, like Kashgar, which is my hometown, and Khotan, the area is completely sealed and, according to Radio Free Asia, 40% to 80% of Uighurs are already held in concentration camps.

I also have to mention that, according to Adrian Zenz, a German scholar, security spending by China for the Uighur region exceeds overall spending for security in China, just for the Uighur area alone. You can see the security control, motion control and movement control of Uighurs from A to Z by using modern technology.

● (1310)

Mr. David Anderson: What people believe is important to them and they want to be able to live out their beliefs. I want you to tell us a little bit about Ramadan and the Chinese government's approach to it this year in terms of their invasion of the privacy of people who just wanted to celebrate their religious events and holidays.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Religious persecution has been going on for a long time. When I was a teacher at Kashgar University in the 1980s, we were not allowed to fast. That was the common practice by the Chinese government. If you work for the government, or a government institute or public sector, you are not allowed to fast; you are not allowed to pray. That has been a common policy for a long time, because the Chinese Communist Party is atheist. They identify themselves as the atheist party.

The most important people are the ordinary students. Before, there were restrictions for the people under the age of 18, and the government officials and the retired government officials, but now an entire religion is criminalized.

Yesterday I heard Radio Free Asia interviewing the local people. Basically, now the government has distributed one simple page of questions: Do you separate halal food from haram food? If the answer is yes, that is a 15-year sentence.

I guess foreign affairs has identified 48 elements that directly send you to a concentration camp. Among those 48 elements are that if you have a beard, if you have a praying mat at home, if you keep Quran, or if you have anything on your cellphone, just God bless. You end up in a concentration camp.

Mr. David Anderson: This sounds like they've learned something from the North Koreans in terms of imprisoning their own citizens.

I want to ask you a little about the citizenship issues.

When we've studied issues here before, a kind of favourite way of a government to punish its own citizens is to restrict their movement and those kinds of things. We've seen this often with the Rohingya, with Ahmadiyya in various areas.

Tell us a bit more about the restriction on citizenship, the taking away of those rights, so that then you can't move, you can't immigrate. Could you talk a little about that?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: With regard to citizenship, China has never regarded Uighurs and Tibetans as its citizens. For that reason, all the time they have a different treatment for those ethnic groups, even though they are recognized as people with a distinct culture and they own their own territory. Therefore, the Chinese constitution granted a national territorial autonomous region: one is for Tibet, one is for Inner Mongolia, and one is for Uighurs and others.

When it comes to citizenship or applying the Chinese criminal code, it is applied differently for Uighurs and Tibetans, and especially for Uighurs, because the Uighur Autonomous Region is directly bordered by eight countries, where the Chinese eye to expand. For that reason, the Chinese government puts on restrictions to strip us of identity: one is a national identity, like characters, language and history, and another is religious identity.

When your two main pillars are restricted, you are criminalized. When you are criminalized, you don't get any benefits from citizenship. For example, for Canadian Uighurs, if you apply at the Chinese embassy right now for a Chinese visa, you have a different set of rules. If you are of Uighur origin and holding a Canadian passport, to go to the Chinese embassy for the same visa, you have a totally different set of rules.

Let us look at Uighurs, for example. If your passport has expired and you live abroad, if you go to the Chinese embassy, they extend your passport. Instead, they cut your passport on one corner and send you to China directly with a one-way travel document.

If your child is born outside, as I mentioned in my brief statement, you will not get any ID documents. The children born outside of China by Uighur parents now become stateless.

It is a very tragic situation.

● (1315)

Mr. David Anderson: I think I have run out of time.

I want you to know that Mr. Celil has not been forgotten by those of us who have been here for a while. We remember him and the situation he finds himself in.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

For seven minutes, we have Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the Uighur community for coming out. I saw you on Parliament Hill yesterday having a demonstration. It takes a lot of courage to raise your voice.

Mr. Tohti, we met in my constituency, and I know that you've met with a lot of members individually. I thank you for raising your voice and your concerns.

I have a question for you to begin.

How many Uighur Canadians are there in Canada?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: In the GTA, the greater Toronto area, I can assume approximately 1,500, including kids. In British Columbia, there are approximately a couple of hundred, and in Montreal, 50. All together, the entire Uighur ethnic group in Canada is approximately 2,000.

Because the Chinese government has highly restricted passports, and now all passports are confiscated, the Uighurs do not have freedom to travel. I've been here in Canada for 20 years. Our population growth is almost zero. There are no more Uighurs coming, because they don't have passports.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: My understanding is that Uighurs outside of China are being forcibly deported, returned into China. What happens to them once they return or are forced to return to China?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: In April, Germany mistakenly deported one Uighur man. He has disappeared. United Arab Emirates deported some Uighurs who had already received UN-mandated refugee status. They disappeared. Egypt, just because of promised Chinese investment, deported 209 Uighurs last year in July. All of them disappeared. There are some scholars from Malaysia. Some Uighurs hijacked by the Chinese government, because their family members were taken hostage, returned just to save their family members. All of them disappeared.

At this time, returning Uighurs is not only dangerous; it is kind of a partnership in crime with the Chinese to make them disappear. In Malaysia, 15 Uighurs who escaped from a Thai jail are being held in Malaysia because Malaysia recognizes the situation in China for Uighurs.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: What happens to those who are placed in concentration camps? Can you describe for us the life situation and what the Uighur community faces when they are in concentration camps?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Let me speak from the situation I know in Canada. Among our community members, there is no single member whose parents or relatives are not in a concentration camp.

One gentleman in Montreal whose name is Erkin Haji Kuerban has 75 family members or extended family members in concentration camps right now.

In my case, I have 37 family members or extended family members in concentration camps. I haven't spoken with my mother for two years. No one has been able to communicate with their parents or loved ones for two years. It is not only Canadian Uighurs but all Uighurs around the world. China's government just turned the area into a no-communications zone, a no-rights zone. I cannot call them. They cannot call me. That is the situation. It is impossible to communicate even by text messaging or online chatting. The Chinese government basically controls the Uighurs abroad by taking their family members hostage and at the same time applying pressure to control them to serve or work for the Chinese government. So at this time, being an Uighur is a very brave thing to be.

● (1320)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: So we don't really know what's happing in these concentration camps, because we have no communication with the people who are inside the camps. Are there any NGOs and organizations that are keeping close watch or recording first-hand testimony of the situation on the ground?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: We know a number of those in the concentration camps from the first-hand witnesses who escaped from neighbouring Kazakhstan as a Kazakh national. One is Omurbek Eli. He described the situation more thoroughly. Because of the time limit, I did not get into that. Basically it is more than jail. It is not, as China claimed, vocational training. It is barbed wire. The scholar, Adrian Zenz from Germany identified more than 150 concentration camps. Each camp is holding approximately 8,000 to 20,000 inmates. One Chinese student in British Columbia, Shawn Zhang, used Google images to identify more than 50 concentration camps through Google imagery. Now we can assume, because the Chinese government transferred hundred of thousands of Uighurs to mainland China, there are not enough facilities.

I know from the description that they are served twice a day a meal, just cabbage soup with a little bun. That's it. Basically, 80 people are living in a 25- or 30-square-metre area. One gentlemen from Kazakhstan described, and it was also reported in Canadian media, that basically people shift to lie down face to face because they don't have enough space. Everything in that room is just locked up. Twice a day they put the food inside. That's it. There are no sanitation facilities or anything. Basically many people are coming out dead. Because there are so many dead bodies, the Chinese government is basically building crematoriums near the concentration camp.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks very much.

The Chair: You have seven minutes, Ms. Hardcastle.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Tohti, for your bravery in sharing this information with us. We understand that sharing these details we need to hear makes you vulnerable and that there are risks involved.

I want to ask you, where do you think the potential is for the Canadian government to work with influential organizations? Or maybe I should be asking you if there is an influential group, a population, a segment of society, an organization or a country that China does listen to and that we should be working with on these relationships.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: There are other countries that are speaking up loudly. For example, the United States already has pressured to apply the Magnitsky Act, and high-level U.S. officials are already talking about the Magnitsky Act.

Not only that, but on September 13 I had a meeting in Ottawa with some government officials. It was a closed-door meeting. Basically, when I asked questions about Canada's stand on the Chinese belt and road initiative, Canada did not have any idea. This is the huge plan that the Chinese President presented as a 21st-century Marshall Plan. If it is a Marshall Plan for China, it should be of global significance, as it should be relative to Canada.

The one thing is that when the western countries are united and show a strong response, China will back down, because western democracies are still a huge market for China. China's trillion dollars did not come from Mars. It came from our streets and our malls, and it came from western markets. The Chinese share in the western market is huge—more than 60% or 70%. China's trillion dollars are coming from Canada, the U.S. and Europe, so we have more leverage to put pressure on China.

Secondly, it is important for us to stand up, because as you can see on this map today, that map basically is China's stretched arms and limbs to Europe and the Middle East and everywhere. That map is branching out from the Uighurs' homeland. That's the reason. On the south, in red, is Myanmar. That's the reason the Rohingya genocide is taking place: for China's benefit, to access the Indian Ocean by passing through the Malacca strait.

If this is the grand strategy or a Marshall Plan of China, we should have something to say on on the Chinese Marshall Plan. The United States, the United Kingdom and Germany openly oppose the plan. The United States even put some money on the table to work with countries in order to divert those participating countries from the belt and road initiative.

In Canada, we have a huge leverage around the world, if not on China, and we have to build alliances with the other global powers and work together at the UN and in other international forums.

● (1325)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Tell me more about your understanding of or your perspective on China's role in Myanmar with the Rohingya.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Now it is a common conclusion that China is behind the Rohingya genocide; our House of Commons unanimously accepts that it's genocide. As we know, there is huge tension in the South China Sea. The Chinese government has already built some artificial islands to expand its territorial reach. Most importantly, 70% to 80% of Chinese imports and exports are going through the Malacca strait. Because of the tensions in the South China Sea, the Chinese government wants to have an alternative route to bypass the Malacca strait to have access to the Middle East or the Indian Ocean. For that reason, the Chinese government arranged that genocide in Myanmar, working with Aung San Suu Kyi.

Secondly, the Chinese government has put nearly $62 billion into the Pakistani port of Gwadar. This fishery port was abandoned. No one used it. China put in $62 billion to have access to the Indian Ocean. That Gwadar port cannot be completed without East Turkestan. The land corridor stretching from the Chinese east coast to Gwadar port has to go through East Turkestan. We have a border with Pakistan and India. China doesn't have a border.

Because this is the Marshall Plan for China, what the Chinese government is doing is basically eliminating these people, because otherwise they are going to claim their ancestral homelands one day or another. They are locking them up by the millions and forcing them to starvation in order to achieve what is called the 21st-century Marshall Plan. Because it is a Marshall Plan, the Chinese government did not hesitate to kill Rohingyas or Uighurs.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: As part of our laws, you would like to bring in some of the sanctions that you see in the United States. You'd like to see Canada extend that. What can we do in terms of addressing the stateless status of people?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: As I have said, Canada should issue a public statement. This is not a human rights issue. This is beyond the scope of a human rights issue. Some scholars call it ethnic genocide. Some call it cultural genocide. Some call it collective punishment. Some call it a crime against humanity. It is not a human rights issue that we can talk about behind closed doors. A generic or general statement does not work. We have to call it whatever it is, with a name that fits the action. The United States has called it a concentration camp twice at the United Nations, as have others. The U.S. Congress did too.

As for Canada, our representative mentioned the situation twice at the United Nations. The first time was a disaster. Basically, our representative mentioned "thousands of Uighurs". It's not "thousands". There is a three-zero difference between "millions" and "thousands". Just one concentration camp contains more than 8,000 people, and we have more than 250 concentration camps. We shouldn't shy away from calling it whatever it is and issuing a public statement, just like the European Union, the United Nations and the U.S.

● (1330)

The Chair: Thank you. I'm afraid we're out of time.

We will now go into the second round, which is a five-minute round. We will begin with Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Ms. Chair. Thank you for being here to chair our meeting for our first topic of discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Tohti, for being here, and thank you to the audience behind you for being here and bringing a voice to your community.

I want to ask you about China's leadership, going back a couple of years to the change in leadership. Has that affected the Uighurs more? Has there been less suppression? Could you go through a certain period of leadership, going back 15 or 20 years or more?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: I don't remember who said it, but I remember the phrase.

"China is a sleeping tiger"—or a giant—"When we wake it up, it will be a disaster for the world." Some famous person said that.

China has already had the ambition of controlling the world for a long time. China considers itself the centre, and other people as barbaric. That is part of China's 2000-year-old culture. If you look at 2000 years of China's history, you'll see that China expanded continuously, without losing any territory. The British empire lost. The Ottoman empire lost. The Soviet empire lost. But for 2000 years, China did not lose an inch because China never makes a clear border agreement with other countries. When it gets stronger, it claims territory. That is exactly what is going on in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and other countries.

If you look at a Chinese textbook today, you'll see that there is a famous phrase saying that Genghis Khan united all of China. What does it mean? The areas where Genghis Khan went are supposed to belong to China. That's what it means. Now China is in a stronger financial situation, so it is spending money, and lending money to countries it knows cannot afford to pay.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: In particular, was there more violence toward the Uighurs, or more oppression, specifically in terms of past leadership, or has it been consistent?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Xi Jinping's policy is extreme, but other leaders' policies were also oppressive. I have to say that. There is opposition to China's leader Xi Jinping in China. The opposition is not about what he is doing or his goals. The opposition says, "Why are you making everything out of box? We should pursue under the table, smoothly, without waking up other people. Now you are waking up the western countries and their opposition," and this and that.

As long as China's ambitious plan is there to colonize the world—they are boss of the world—if not this leader, it will be the next leader. It will be the same policy. As a western democracy, we should be afraid if China has already begun to export its style of authoritarianism to neighbouring countries or elsewhere, to replace our western values. That should alarm us.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: My next question is about journalists. Are journalists able to access densely populated Uighur communities, or is it still relatively inaccessible to journalists? Have they been attacked, or have they been shunned from being in certain communities?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: There is no access for journalists so far. The last journalist I saw that set foot in the Uighur region was Emily Feng from the Financial Times.

I have spoken with her a number of times. She is of Chinese ethnic origin and has a little bit more leverage to talk with the officials, but for western journalists, I don't think so.

The Globe and Mail representative in Beijing is Nathan VanderKlippe, and I had an exchange with him. It is tough. So far, there are no western journalists who have set foot there.

● (1335)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sweet, for five minutes.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Chair. Mr. Tohti, thank you very much for your testimony.

Are there other Muslim Turkic minorities being persecuted along with the Uighurs?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Yes, the ethnic Kazakhs, the Kurds, and the native people of East Turkestan. It is not only the Uighurs, they are part of this persecution as well.

The Kazakhs and Kurds fled to neighbouring stan countries. Some of them managed to escape and saved their lives. Many of them still languish in concentration camps.

Mr. David Sweet: You used a term that I've heard before from Dr. Lobsang Sangay from the Tibetan government in exile. He said you have a cultural genocide going on.

Is China using a strategy that is similar to the Tibetan autonomous region? Is China transporting Han Chinese in to make sure it has domination in the area? Is China moving them in by the trainloads, by the busloads?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: In 1950, when the Chinese communist army came to the region under the command of Wang Zhen, there were about 2,500 to 3,000 Chinese in the whole area. Now even the Chinese government says it is 46% Chinese. If you include paramilitary forces, or some seasonal workers, the overall Chinese population could be more than Uighurs.

More Uighurs are now in jail, and opportunities are only provided to the Chinese, who are coming. Uighur girls are forced to marry the Chinese. There are home-stay programs for Uighur families by Chinese officials with a 24-hour watch. Basically, the Chinese are the dominant power at every level of life, not only at the government level.

Mr. David Sweet: Another group that the People's Republic of China has been notorious at persecuting are the Falun Gong. We have accumulated quite a bit of evidence. In fact, we've had two rounds of testimony here by two gentlemen, David Matas and David Kilgour, regarding organ harvesting.

Has that been happening to Uighurs as well?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Actually, organ harvesting first started with the Uighurs in China because, more or less, they are supporters of Falun Gong either secretly in government or in civil society. So if anything happens, immediately people make it public. For that reason, they have more access to information, and access to information is not that strict for ordinary Chinese citizens. For Uighurs and Tibetans, it is absolutely a no-right zone.

For that reason, for example, now hundreds of thousands of Uighurs have been transported to mainland China, totally separated from their families, totally separated from their cultural roots. What is the consequence waiting for them? There is organ harvesting for hundreds of thousands.

The Chinese government doesn't hesitate to turn Uighurs' bodies into money. Instead of feeding them three times or twice, their organs are used and the bodies are burned in a crematorium. That is the practice of the Chinese government. Organ harvesting is more severely under-reported for Uighurs than for any other people in China.

Mr. David Sweet: Could you tell me specifically who are the most important people we would like to see here who we could question? Are there witnesses who could give us specific evidence to connect the Chinese persecution of Uighurs and the Chinese persecution of Rohingyas? Could you name that person? Also, could you name any other person we should make sure we hear from in regard to the best kind of witness testimony to authenticate all of what you've told us?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: For the best information about Uighur persecution and the Rohingya persecution in China, I can work on that and I will provide you with the name of an expert, not the media report. I can do that.

For organ harvesting, I can provide the name right now. Dr. Enver Tohti. He lives in the U.K. and he was a practising doctor before, and he has witnessed the organ harvesting of Uighurs. So there are a number of well-qualified witnesses to testify on that.

● (1340)

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you very much.

The Chair: If you could send that list to the clerk, we'll make sure that's distributed to the committee.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Sure, I will.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we have Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you all once again.

Mr. Tohti, can you explain to us what these maps mean, in light of the briefs that you've submitted to us?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: There is China's belt and road initiative, proposed in 2014 by President Xi Jinping, owned by President Xi Jinping, and endorsed by President Xi Jinping. It is called a 21st-century Marshall Plan. It runs from the east coast of China all the way north to Moscow, to Europe and the Middle East, and to the southern part of Europe and Africa. There are four land lines, land corridors, as they are called, and also the Maritime Silk Road.

The Maritime Silk Road connects two points. One is Myanmar, stretching to the south. The second one connects to the Maritime Silk Road and the land corridor, and that's the Pakistani Gwadar port, which stretches from East Turkestan to Pakistan, because we have a border, and in the middle is the Central Asian land line. It covers Kazakhstan, Kurdistan, and the northern line stretches to Moscow.

The central part is the region of the Uighurs. The southern part is Tibet. The northwestern part is the Uighur region, what we call East Turkestan and China calls Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

Because China wants to achieve this 21st-century Marshall Plan, they are not hesitating to eliminate whatever they see as obstacles. The majority of Turkic and Muslim people are silent on the atrocities of the Uighurs, because they are expecting some kind of financial share from the promised Chinese investment.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You mentioned that other countries that are part of this may not be speaking out because they're expecting financial gain. I understand there are some states that have spoken out. Can you elaborate a little bit on those countries that have spoken out?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: One is Malaysia, besides all major western powers, I mean. Malaysia publicly spoke out not only against China's belt and road initiative but also against China's oppression of Uighurs. Another is Pakistan, which also started to speak out because Pakistan realized that with the Chinese belt and road initiative, despite the investment, the majority of the construction and other money that China spends goes back to China again. That is, Pakistan realized that it kills the Pakistani industry.

In addition, there are more than 300 Uighurs married to Pakistani gentlemen, and all of them are in concentration camps right now. Some of the Pakistani gentlemen went to Beijing to protest, working with the Pakistani embassy in Beijing. Besides that, Europe, all the member states, twice issued a public statement. The United Nations issued a public statement. The United States and Australia had a fair hearing on these atrocities. Mostly, though, it's the western democracies that are talking about this, and then also Pakistan and Malaysia.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: When you say that they're talking about this, what is the nature of their statements? Are they outright condemning this practice? Are they taking any measures outside of the statements? Can you please describe what actions they're taking?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Malaysia has stopped all Chinese investment under the name of belt and road initiative after the new presidential election. It not only stopped and paused the Chinese build and their other initiatives. At the same time, they spoke up and condemned the Chinese treatment of Uighurs in concentration camps.

Pakistan expressed concern about religious restrictions of Uighurs by the Chinese government. The statement is about concern, not condemnation.

The United Nations called on the Chinese government to close the camps and release the Uighurs.

● (1345)

The Chair: We go to Ms. Hardcastle for five minutes.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Thank you, Madam Chair.

For a long time, foreign ownership in Canada has been a very political issue. It's escalated over time with Chinese-owned infrastructure in Canada now. I know you've talked a bit about sanctions like what the United States is doing with the Magnitsky law. Do you think the government should be going further than individual financial sanctions? Can you expand on that, in terms of Chinese ownership in Canada? Even as recently as the Canadian Wheat Board, the port at Churchill....

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: You are right. The sanctions are one part, and they are just on the individuals who are responsible. Mostly, we have to show some strong reaction.

As you said, China invests in strategic sectors like energy and infrastructure, so Canada should carefully review the Chinese investments and stop them. That is the mistake we have to learn from Australia and New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand turned their policy 180 degrees on Chinese investment because they lost a strategic part of Australia. So Canada is second.

When foreign money comes in, we have to be careful where that money is coming from and for what purpose. We have to review, not even from the dimension of the Uighur issue, but from the dimension of Canadian strategic investment.

The second thing is, we have to check if there are Canadian high-tech industries that are selling high-tech products to China for iris scans and DNA samples, or some others, and the camera security—digital cameras. The United States is looking into it and in Canada we have to look into it. Our products should not be used as a tool to repress other people.

There's a range of things we can do in Canada. We can not only issue a public statement, but at the same time review Chinese investments and why our key industries and key facilities are of big interest for the Chinese government.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: What do you think are the best methods for us to be able to collect evidence that is needed if we're ever going to pursue any kind of human rights complaints at the United Nations level? Do you think that it should go through the United Nations, to be able to collect this evidence? What do you see as the global community's reaction?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Well, we have to start from our own country, from Canada, and have our communities give testimony—everyone. Those people behind me right now, they have a list of relatives currently in Chinese concentration camps. We are going to collect those names as a community. It will be done everywhere—in the United States and Europe. There will be huge numbers. We will provide that list of names and information to your attention. Uighur Americans will do this with their government, and Uighur Europeans will do this with their respective governments. Then it will be channelled to one source, the United Nations, from our own respective governments. That is a good way.

The Chair: Now we'll go to additional questions from Mr. Anderson. If other members wish to ask any additional questions, indicate to the chair.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

You said the government has not spoken out on these issues. Does it go further than that? Are you aware of any situations where Turkish Muslim refugees or immigrants have been returned to China from Canada?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: So far, I don't know. There is one Uighur girl who received a deportation order. After it became known, I immediately visited the department of foreign affairs and I requested help. I asked my MP, Mr. Omar Alghabra, and said, listen this is going to be a scandal for Canada if we send this Uighur girl, who just turned 18, to China. Her parents are here in Canada. So, there is one girl, who is 18, who received a deportation order. That order is still there, and enforceable.

● (1350)

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you for that.

You're talking about Magnitsky and applying that. Have you identified officials who should be included in that? The U.S. is speaking about that. Are there people who are already on the list that you are suggesting—you don't need to name them now—and could you provide that list if you have it?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Yes. I was a member of the team that worked on those names, so I know the names on that list. I was part of the team to identify them. The actions related to the crimes happened on the ground, so I can provide that list for you.

Mr. David Anderson: You mentioned Mr. Huseyin Jelil earlier, and I didn't realize we would get a second round here. Can you tell us a little bit about his situation and what that is today?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Unless there is urgent action by the international community.... We regretted not taking action or not accepting the Jewish people in the 1950s. We regretted and we issued an apology. Some countries like Communist China are dangerous. Some dangerous policies are still going on, such as killing people indiscriminately, or holding them in concentration camps.

As a world community, we have a responsibility not only to speak up but also to take action to prevent that kind of large-scale mass murder. It happened under our watch with the Rohingyas not that long ago. That was a couple of years ago and it's still going on. So we have to be very forceful and speak up.

Mr. David Anderson: Can you tell me a bit more about this forced separation? Who are the people who are being taken from their community? You talked about organ harvesting being a potential end for that. Communities are being broken up. Is it the younger people who are being taken away? Are families just randomly being separated? Who is being removed from the district and shipped across China?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: You might be surprised. Fifty-four professors from the so-called Xinjiang University, Uighurs, were taken to a concentration camp. Rahile Dawut, a well-known anthropologist who graduated from a U.S. university, disappeared nine months ago and it is now confirmed that she is in a concentration camp. Four of my teachers in Kashgar University, Uighurs, are in the concentration camp. Singers, soccer players, dancers—people from every walk of life have been taken into a concentration camp.

Mr. David Anderson: I think my time may be up.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

If you would like to ask one more question, we have a little bit of time.

Mr. David Sweet: For over five decades the Burmese military had no evidence at all that the Rohingya had ever touched or made any kind of violent act toward anyone. Recently there was a trumped-up event in which apparently 30 of them had bats and clubs and went into some police stations, and for that reason half a million more Rohingya were driven out of the country to Bangladesh. Is there any evidence at all that the People's Republic of China uses to say that the Uighurs are a threat to their security?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: There's no evidence that Uighurs are a security threat to China. This is number one. If Uighurs are a security threat for China, then how about the scholars? Even the senior-level government official who served as the top energy minister, whose name is Nur Bekri, is under investigation. On July 5, 2009, during the Urumqi massacre, Nur Bekri was the governor of the Uighur Autonomous Region. So China is not discriminating depending on whether you are security threat or not. China is always trumping up charges. Before 9/11 it was separatism. After 9/11 it was terrorism. Now it is vocational training.

If there is a security threat, the Chinese government should tell us what it is.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you.

The Chair: We have two or three minutes remaining, Mr. Tohti, if there's anything we didn't get a chance to address or if you have anything you'd like to say in closing.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: I would like to appeal to each member here. We are in Canada. We are proudly Canadian. We always speak up and promote human rights globally. The Canadian position when it comes to this issue is a little disappointing for every member of our community. We can issue a public statement. Those people behind me, and many others who are working on it and who could not make it here, are frustrated because their family members are in concentration camps. They cannot talk with them. They cannot say, "How are you, my dad?" It is really frustrating, so Canada should speak up.

Second, there are some spousal sponsor applications already approved by the Canadian mission and the visas are ready, but because the spouses are in China and their passports have been confiscated they cannot go to the embassy and pick up their visa. The Canadian mission set the deadline at 30 days or 60 days. Otherwise you have to start the whole process again. At least we can ask the government to extend that. Because this is a special situation, it requires special measures. This is just a request from our community.

● (1355)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your compelling testimony.

Thank you to members of the committee for your interventions and questions.

Also, thank you to the members of the public who have shown such interest in this meeting.

Our next committee meeting will be on Thursday to discuss committee business. The next meeting will be in camera, and I would ask that you bring your ideas and suggestions for future studies to that meeting.

With that, I adjourn the meeting.

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